READER'S DIGEST
PLEASANTVILLE, N.Y. 10570

ROVING EDITOR • *Henry Hurt*

November 24, 1984

Dear Judge Jones,

Last spring, my children saw an advertisement in the Star-Tribune offering twenty-five pounds of something called GROWEENA. The ad said that if my children would buy the GROWEENA, they in turn would get FREE a bunch of chickens.

Well, that's an financial opportunity that hardly could be resisted. Charlie and Robert were certain that, by taking advantage of this bonanza, the Hurt family could become quite prosperous by raising chickens and selling eggs around town. I explained to the boys that I, as a boy of their age, once went into the chicken business for the same reason. My hens grew to be about frying size when there came a long, great rain. My chickens all went out and, I reckon, stuck their gullets straight up in the air. Next morning, all my chickens were drowned dead.

Charlie, Robert and Elizabeth explained to me that this would never happen with their chickens. One thing led to another, and we wound up with six baby chicks and a sack of GROWEENA. We bought the chickens from my friend Billy Easley, and the whole brood is known as "Billy Easley's Hens." We brought them home and put them in the downstairs bathtub, where they grew into "henhood." Well, as it turned out, they weren't all hens. Among them were three handsome roosters. I suppose that's fine, having one hen for each rooster. It at least sounds a little less bigamous than what you usually think about roosters and hens.

Some weeks after their arrival, the chickens got to smelling right bad in the downstairs bathtub. The children moved them down to Ray Harris's old golf house in our garden. (I understand that many years before the golf house was created, the actual building was a chicken house. So we really were just getting back to basics by putting the chickens in there.) There, they grew splendidly, gulping down GROWEENA like it was

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water. Not only did they grow, but they began to gain confidence and moved out of their quarters and took over the yard. One even learned how to hop on the dog's back and ride along scratching and pecking for insects on the dog's back. The dog enjoyed the scratching immensely, and the rooster prospered as he grew large and handsome from whatever he was eating from the dog's back.

Well, Judge Jones, I don't need to tell you what happened next. The three roosters began to learn to crow. They weren't much at first, but they practiced every day. They practiced a lot. We had several compliments from people over on Catalpa Drive who were happy to hear roosters in Chatham, again, after such a long time. However, we did not receive any compliments from our closest neighbors. Indeed, the roosters gained such confidence that they would stride into the neighbors' yards and practice their crowing at daybreak, in some cases right under our neighbors' windows.

Since you have been a wonderful friend for all of my 42 years, I can tell you that I wasn't all that concerned about the neighbors' opinions of the roosters. (In addition to crowing, they became even so confident that they would chase dogs and little children.) But I will admit to you that it was when I began to be awakened at daybreak that I decided to move the chickens up to Redeye. Sadly, two of Billy Easley's "hens" that really were hens had been killed by dogs by the time I took the decision to get them out of town.

It was a rainy day when I loaded the three roosters and one hen into the back seat of my car and drove them to Redeye. They were not too bothered by this, and one rooster even got into the front seat and crowed a couple of times. I turned them loose up at my house at Redeye. A couple of the roosters got into a fight over something, but I put some GROWEENA out and suggested a roost for them. It seemed to have the makings for a satisfactory situation.

By this time, the chickens had gained names. The main rooster came to be named Chicken Salad. The second rooster is named Roaster. The third rooster--whom the other two beat up every now and then--is named Finger Lickin' Good. The lone hen, who reminds me of a lady I met at Chatham Hall, is named Mrs. Reilly. They have now been up there for about three months.

Whenever I go to Redeye to work, I get out of the car, slam the door, and give a loud COCKLE-DOODLE-DOO! Sometimes the chickens are a half mile down the hollow, but they begin to crow back and start running and flying for the house. Once they get there, the roosters begin

to fence with me. We dance around for awhile, and then they go on about their business.

My reason for this letter is to tell you about what happened the other day. It was around eight in the morning when a fellow knocked on my door at the Redeye house. It was cold and I let him in to stand by the fire. I didn't know the fellow, but he said his name was Ramsey and that he was from Chatham. He was a nice sort of fellow and asked if he and his son and their dogs could hunt my hollow for rabbits. I told him how much I enjoyed listening to rabbit dogs and that I would be happy for him to hunt the hollow. We stepped out of the house and all the roosters came around to pay their respects. One of them ran at Mr. Ramsey, but he gamely stepped out of the way. He then told me that he didn't believe that his rabbit dogs, all of whom were in his truck, had ever seen a rooster. He was concerned that they might go after my roosters. I asked Mr. Ramsey if he believed his rabbit dogs knew what a rabbit looked like. He said that he believed so. Based on that, I told Mr. Ramsey that I was confident that his dogs would not bother my roosters.

Well, Judge Jones, you know that the main thing about a rooster is that they only go after things that back away from them. If you run, they chase. If you run at them, they retreat. Well, this nice Mr. Ramsey let his dogs out of the truck. There were five or six of them. Pretty little rabbit dogs, ready to go. They took one look at the roosters, gazed for a moment, and clearly decided that they were not rabbits. The dogs turned and went off in the opposite direction, down the hollow. Well, the roosters, seeing this sign of retreat, took off after Mr. Ramsey, his son, and the rabbit dogs. Chicken Salad was leading the pack, with Roaster following. Mrs. Reilly brought up the rear. Rarely have I heard such a commotion, the roosters crowing, Mrs. Reilly squawking and the rabbit dogs yelping.

Now, I don't mind prancing around the Redeye house with these roosters, but I just didn't want to get involved with this nice Mr. Ramsey and his son. He had clearly not understood, fully at least, why these roosters were there in the first place. He would really have been confused if I took off down the hollow COCKLE-DOODLE-DOOING and yelling for Chicken Salad to lay off the rabbit dogs. I retreated into the house, pretending to notice nothing unusual. But I raced to the window that looks down the hollow. Soon enough, the rabbit dogs had shown the roosters a few things about rabbit dogs, and something of a standoff developed. Things calmed down a little, and I watched as Mr. Ramsey, his son, ~~the~~ dogs and my roosters disappeared down the hollow. Their

For the next four hours, as I sat at my desk working, I could hear the rabbit dogs working the hollow. You know what a fine sound that is on a nice autumn day. I didn't hear too much from the roosters. But again and again, when Mr. Ramsey would call to his dogs to bring them around a little, I would hear Chicken Salad trumpeting back with his grand COCKLE-DOODLE-DOO.

Around noon, I heard the dogs getting closer. I went to the window and here they all came--Mr. Ramsey, his son, their dogs and my roosters. Mr. Ramsey did not look at the house as he walked slowly to his truck. The men unloaded their shotguns and lifted each little rabbit dog back into truck. I had not heard a single shot while the men were in the hollow. The roosters, sensing I suppose that these men gathered and dogs getting into a truck signified a retreat, Chicken around. Salad took one last run at Mr. Ramsey, who gamely stepped into his truck. Both men then looked down toward the house. I quickly stepped back from the window. They drove off.

I guess if we wanted to give a name to this little sequence of events, we could call it THE DAY THE ROOSTERS WENT RABBIT HUNTING.

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All around, I hear people expressing great distress that you are in the hospital. When Margaret and Robert saw you ~~about the second day~~, she reported that you had received something like forty cards and letters. Since I imagine you have already heard most of the news in town, I wanted to bring you up on the roosters.

You are in our thoughts and prayers, and I look forward to seeing you soon--either at church or hanging around the courthouse.

Margaret joins me in sending affection and good wishes.

Sincerely,

Hurt.

Judge Langhorne Jones
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